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The Cheerful Letter

Every place a church; every day the Lord's day; all events blessings; all joy thanksgiving; and all nature and life full of Good.—James Freeman Clarke.

Vol. XLVI **DECEMBER, 1937** **No. 6**

IT DOES NOT TAKE GREAT GIFTS

It does not take great gifts to make
A happy heart on Christmas night—
A little child, a plain, clean room,
A holly wreath, and candlelight,
And love beside a lighted hearth,
Makes Christmas anywhere on earth.

I shall not ask for gifts, dear God,
If I may have these things from Thee:
A star-hung roof, a swinging door,
A walk that leads my friends to me;
The faith undimmed that I have had—
And any Christmas would be glad.

—Grace Noll Crowell.

THE GIFTS OF THE MAGI

"CHRISTMAS-TIME would be far poorer without the Wise Men and their star," says John Erskine. "They are the romance of the story. How romantic to see the kings with their gifts—wise kings at that—kneeling before the manger, with the sleepy cattle looking on. They came from the East, that mysterious region from which life and wisdom, in the old stories, always emerge. What were they wise about? At first blush, we might say the story doesn't specify their wisdom. They followed a star, the kind of light which makes us think of spiritual things. And what an end to their search for truth—to find this forlorn family in a stable! We should like to know what they thought, and just why they gave their handsome gifts, and what they said when they got home. But their departure is as inscrutable as their coming."

Now here is the reason why the Magi gave their particular gifts.

In that mysterious East from which the Magi came, are always coming, there are three countries which are to be found on no map.

The first country is a bleak land, with scarcely any beauty for the eye to rest upon. The ground is rocky, the skies are gray, and chill winds blow. But in this country man's will wrestles with nature, extracts precious things from the earth, draws forth mighty powers, puts these powers in harness for driving the chariots of material necessity. It is a land of incessant enterprise; and there men are seen in busy action, making and remaking, getting and spending. From this country came the First Wise Man. And he brought *Gold.*

The second country is a land of magnificent distances. There are fertile fields in the plains; but on the horizon stand great, blue mountains with snowy peaks where no man has ever set foot. And in this land are many white temples where men worship Truth. They seek increase of knowledge; find strength in ideas; dig the foundations of new thought; take flights of daring imagination. And the brightness of intellect is over the land. From this country came the Second Wise Man. And he brought *Frankincense.*

The third country is a land of luxuriant sunlight and radiant color. Blossoming trees are there all the year round, and many unfading flowers. On pleasant hillsides, by quiet streams, are seen populous clusters of homes. Everywhere in this land men walk in friendship, meet in love, put forth their trust toward one another. And when night falls, there are to be heard little, wandering, wistful songs. From this country came the Third Wise Man. And he brought liquid *Myrrh.*

So these three together, being as wise

Publication Office
134 Summer Street, Boston, Mass.

Monthly, except August
50 cents a year. Single copy, 5 cents

Bessie Dickerson Ducey, Editor
159 Grandview Ave., Wollaston, Mass.

Check, post-office order, or stamps should be sent to the Cheerful Letter Exchange
25 Beacon Street, Boston, Mass.

Entered as second-class matter at the post office at Boston, Mass.

"Acceptance for mailing at the special rate of postage provided for in Section 1103. Act of October 3, 1917, authorized July 17, 1922."

as they were, each perhaps as wise as the other, followed the star and were responsive to the sign of all times and were aware of some eternal value in the midst of the world of life. And coming to the place where there was the straw of the soil and the sleepy animals and the manger which human hands had made, they found the Strange Being in whom all hopes and fears perpetually meet—the maker of all history, the promise of the future, the heir of all things, the supreme possession—the Child. And to him they offered each the substance of a country—the country of the busy will, and the country of the aspiring intellect, and the country of the robust affections. To him who is the Lord of Equity, they gave the Gold—the sign of Labor; to him who is the Lord of Truth, they gave the Frankincense—the sign of Thought; to him who is the Lord of Love, they gave the gift of Myrrh—the symbol of all Affection. Thus was the threefold Realm of Man offered to the Lord of All; and body, mind, and heart were given to the service of the godlike Life.

This meaning of the wondrous story points partly to what we gladly recognize as being already in the world, and partly to the promise of what shall be. With less of poetry, but no less of vision, how do we show forth the secrets of the Magi? How do we open our treasures and devote them to the Lord of Life?

There is the Gift of Gold. It is all man's striving for material possessions and the spirit in which we use them. It is all the world of labor and industry and commerce, of invention and acquisition and use. One unselfish day in the year—at Christmas—will not bring that gift where it belongs. No magical change or charity of Scrooge will bring it. See the many faces marked by pre-occupation with the problem of scanty means; see those who know the price of things and not their value; see those to whom success is a golden padlock. Then consider the Wise Man and the Gift of Gold to a priceless Life. If we are followers of the star, if we are interpreters of this world's high purpose, we shall swing toward a truer valuation of things than has dictated the scrambles of the past. It is a perverted order of values which outrages human life. The Child matters most. How much will you take for the infant John or Winifred in your home? Reckon in millions, and then laugh! But how much for any child?—in Chicago, or Vienna, or China? How much do you care that the commerce of the world shall work, as it may, for peace and welfare, and not for rapacity and the detriment of human lives? There is a new and divine equity growing in our midst. To this equity, if we are wise, we shall give our hands.

And there is the Gift of Frankincense. It is the emblem of man's quest for knowledge and beauty. It signifies the human heritage of learning and art, and all the lovely promise of man's power of thought and understanding. See the subway news stand. Oh, the frankincense! But you who read *The Boston Transcript* and the best books, new and old—how much has your mind grown since you left school and college? Judge by its power to set aside a prejudice when a truth confronts you. How often do you say, "It was my opinion; but I see I must change it"? Is not that to be intellectually alive to divine possibilities in our midst? Is it not for lack of fearless intelligence that the world is in constant peril, and democracy is still a hazardous experiment? What a splendid figure of the proper office of education is this offering of the frankincense to the Child! That is what every real teacher is doing. Let the teachers magnify their calling.

They are numbered with the Magi, who bring knowledge to the Holy Child. And there is a new and divine truth growing in our midst. To this truth, if we are wise, we shall give our minds.

And there is the Gift of Myrrh. It is the token of our service of love. It signifies every healing charity, every uncalculating generosity, every endearing relationship. The very gladness of the heart of love is in the gift of myrrh. Remember O. Henry's story of the two poor, dear young people at Christmas, who "unwisely sacrificed for each other the greatest treasures of their house." And "He" stole out and sold his precious watch to buy "Her" a fine comb for her hair, while at the same hour "She" sold her hair to buy "Him" a coveted fob for his watch! But when this folly of the self-giving ones runs short, all our charities become busybodies and our most benevolent schemes begin to creak. All our good errands lose their way at last, unless they carry with them the Love which can see God and the Neighbor in one person. The star will hover over any cradle, will stop over any place, will stand over a man's own house, if there is someone bringing the gift of myrrh. And every day there is a new and divine love born in our midst. To this love, if we are very wise, we shall give our hearts.

—*Vivian T. Pomeroy.*

THE BIRDS' CHRISTMAS

FOR many years it has been the custom, in Norway, for the young people of every village to give a special dinner to the wild birds near by. For several days before Christmas, the children go out into the woods, clear places in which to put food, cut poles and brush, and erect covers, so, when the birds come to get the food, they may be sheltered from the cold winds.

In addition to this, the peasants fasten wisps of oat straw on their houses, so that the birds may find them and enjoy the grain; also, the market places have poles on which are tied great bunches of unthreshed oats and many vegetables that the birds like.

The children delight in thus remembering their feathered friends and count the number of different birds that come to the places prepared for them. After the birds have enjoyed their food, the children gather around the poles, dance and sing songs, and play games appropriate to the occasion.

It is not unusual to see many bird visitors that keep away from dwellings at every other time. When they have had their fill of the good things, they fly away to the forests and again go into hiding. These shy visitors are considered omens of good fortune to the happy young people who include their feathered friends in the celebration of the day.

—*Christian Register.*

LET US KEEP CHRISTMAS

Whatever else be lost among the years,
Let us keep Christmas still a shining thing;
Whatever doubts assail us, or what fears,
Let us hold close one day, remembering
Its poignant meaning for the hearts of men.
Let us get back our childlike faith again.

Wealth may have taken wings, yet still there are
Clear windowpanes to glow with candlelight;
There are boughs for garlands, and a tinsel star
To tip some little fir tree's lifted height.
There is no heart too heavy or too sad,
But some small gift of love can make it glad.

And there are home-sweet rooms where laughter rings,
And we can sing the carols as of old.
Above the eastern hills a white star swings;
There is an ancient story to be told;
There are kind words and cheering words to say.
Let us be happy on the Christ Child's day.

—Grace Noll Crowell.

CORRESPONDENTS AND APPEALS

Letters should be addressed to Mrs. Laura M. Hurst, 78 Penfield Street, Roslindale, Mass.

Persons writing to the Department for the first time should ask for an enrollment blank and give as reference the name and address of their minister.

When a correspondent moves to a new address, notice should be sent to Headquarters, 25 Beacon Street, Boston, Mass., and to those persons who have been sending letters and reading matter.

It is necessary to state positively that the Cheerful Letter Exchange is not a "clothing bureau" and not a "charitable" society in the usual sense of the word.

It is contrary to the rules of the Cheerful Letter Exchange to allow any one to make use of its magazine by addressing letters asking for money, clothing, or other articles, to those whose names are printed in the paper. This prohibition includes requests to borrow money and the offering of articles for sale. The name of any person who disobeys this rule will be dropped from the list, and any one who receives a request of this description is desired by the Central Committee to return no answer, but to enclose the letter at once to the Chairman of this Department.

Many people do care for just the kind of friendly service for which we are organized. We limit our efforts to them and their wishes.

CHEERFUL LETTER WORKERS

The Exchange wishes to call to your attention that *regular correspondents* should not be called "personal friends" at Christmas, or on any special Anniversary, in order to send coats, dresses, hats, shoes (old or new) and money. This is not according to the rules established by the Cheerful Letter Exchange many years ago. *Regular correspondents* are members of the Cheerful Letter Exchange and cannot be considered "personal friends" no matter how long the friendly correspondence has existed. The approved list of gifts appeared in the November issue of the Magazine and should be the guide in filling holiday or anniversary packages. The workers are asked to cooperate in this respect.

There are many last minute appeals for Christmas cheer and if any local committee can send an additional package or two, or contribute anything to the Exchange, please send word to the above Department at once. It is the desire of the Exchange that every Cheerful Letter member be remembered in some small way.

CORRESPONDENTS

These *regular correspondents* may be adopted after postcard consultation with Mrs. Laura M. Hurst, 78 Penfield Street, Roslindale, Mass. This is important and it should be done in order to avoid duplication in arranging for *regular correspondents.*

1. Mrs. William Carl Ranson, Mountview, W. Va., is asking for a regular correspondent. She is 35 years old and has seven children, four boys, aged 4, 6, 12, and 18, and three girls, aged 2, 8, and 15. Most of her time is spent in planning and taking care of the family. The husband works for the W.P.A., but it is impossible to ever attend any entertainments of any kind, so Mrs. Ransom hopes a *regular correspondent* will fill this need in her busy life.

2. I am a widow with two small children; both boys, one aged 2 years and the other 5 months. My husband left me without any way of support and it is pretty hard getting along. Our home is in a rough hollow and it gets awfully lonesome. I would like to hear from one of the workers each month and I also could use some quilt scraps. My boy would like some Christmas toys. Mrs. Cora Welch, Tuckerdale, N. C.

3. Mrs. Dell Stuart, R. 2, Grassy Creek, N. C., is a young married woman, twenty-five years old. Her little boy is three years old. Mr. Stuart is away most of the time and she thinks a letter now and then would keep her from being so lonely. Mrs. Stuart likes to sew and hopes someone will adopt her in time so that her little boy will be remembered for Christmas.

4. I am writing this Department because I want my name published so I will get a *regular correspondent.* I am 28 years old and have two boys, ages 8 and 10. Both the children attend school, and paper and pencils would please them very much. Mrs. James Howell, R. 1, Whitetop, Va.

5. Mrs. Gordon Stegall, Monroe, N. C., is 48 years old and has five children, one boy, age 15, and four girls, ages 12, 19, 25, and 27. She has been shut in for most a year and would be glad to have a *regular correspondent.* Her life is very lonely and blue and if someone could spare a bit of cheer now and then it would be more than appreciated.

6. Mrs. Eliza Page, Crabtree, Ark., writes she would be interested in a *regular correspondent* and any good reading. She is 24 years old and has a baby girl. Their home is in the mountains, twelve miles from town. Her husband has a job and there being no near neighbors things are rather quiet. Will the one who adopts her please send some quilt scraps?

7. A friend gave me a copy of the *Cheerful Letter Magazine* and it gave me so much pleasure I decided to write you for a *regular correspondent* and see if I, too, could get a little cheer. We are a newly married couple, just started out, and have a baby girl. I hate to think of the long winter ahead because we will be so shut in, but I count on some good friend to write me and send some sewing materials. Mrs. Ada Scott, Buffalo Ridge, Va.

8. Mrs. Elton Reves, Rupert, Ark., is 43 years old and has seven children, three boys, ages 5, 12, and 15, and four girls, ages 8, 12, and 14. Her neighborhood is very thinly settled and she has not much of an opportunity to make any friends. She looks to the Cheerful Letter Exchange for a *regular correspondent* and Christmas cheer for the family.

9. I hope I may enter your dear circle. I haven't much health owing to a serious operation about a year ago. My husband is away from home trying to make a living at a saw mill. I am 39 years old and have four girls, ages 3, 5, 7, and 9. I like to sew and read and, of course, the girls would like to receive some Christmas remembrances. Mrs. Minnie E. Vaughan, Stuart, Va.

APPEALS

These appeals are not to be taken as *regular correspondents* and need not be answered a second time. As the holiday season approaches, please see that toys, games, and candy are included in each package where there are children in the family.

1. Mrs. Sadie Ham, Sturgills, N. C., is a widow with three little girls, ages 4, 7, and 9. Their home is in the country where there is not very much going on. The children look forward to a visit from Santa Claus and Mrs. Ham would enjoy some sewing materials.

2. It has been some time since I have had an appeal printed and I do hope you will publish my letter because my husband died last summer and left me with four small children; three boys, ages 1, 4, and 14, and an eight-year-old girl. I also have my aged father with me. Please send us some Christmas cheer. It will mean so much to me. Mrs. J. R. Sturgills, Volney, Va.

3. Mrs. A. M. Ashley, Warrensville, N. C., writes that she cannot afford to buy anything for Christmas for her four children, two boys and two girls, ages from 9 to 20, and hopes some member of the Exchange will send a box. She is making a quilt and wants a few more pieces together with some thread. She sends a Merry Christmas to the Exchange.

4. It is many, many years since I

have had an appeal printed and I have had many ups and downs since then. My husband has poor health and his aged grandmother who lives with us is badly crippled with rheumatism. A little cheer would help a lot during the long cold months ahead. I have to stay so close to home that I could make use of any Bible reading and quilt scraps. Perhaps you would be able to include some Christmas goodies. Mrs. Milbert Hall, Ferrum, Va.

5. Mrs. Jessie Lavinder, Glasgow, Va., hasn't heard from anyone for a long time. Now that Christmas is coming she asks for toys for her little boy, but does not give his age. Her husband does not have any regular work and a Christmas box including used cards, sewing materials and some candy will help to make a pleasant holiday.

6. Mrs. Floyd Stamper, Konnarock, Va., has four children, ages 16 months, 3, 4, and 5 years. Their Christmas will be much brighter if some kind friend puts the family on her list. Something for the children, Christmas tree decorations, candy and reading.

7. Mrs. Cora Joyce, Callahan, Fla., asks for Christmas cheer. She has a boy 9 years old and two daughters, ages 11 and 22. The oldest girl works in the W.P.A. sewing room. Reading, games and candy are mentioned.

8. We live so far from any activity that it gets pretty lonesome for us in the winter. That is why I am writing for some cheer. Also a Christmas package would add quite a bit to our holiday. Some good reading and just anything that is on your approved list. Mrs. Essie Eldreth, Colora, Md.

9. Please print a few lines for me in your magazine. I am the mother of twelve children, four at home, and my father, who is 84 years old, blind and deaf, lives with us. I am confined to the house most of the time owing to so much sickness and death. Christmas cheer of any kind would gladden our hearts, I can tell you. May God bless you all in your good work. Mrs. Ella Testerman, Helton, N. C.

10. Miss Liddie Blevins, Husk, N. C., is 26 years old. Her mother has been a *regular correspondent* for several years but Miss Liddie wants to be a member of the Exchange in her own right. Her request is sewing materials, quilt scraps, embroidery and thread. A few Christmas sweets might be included in the package.

11. I have changed my address. Now we live on rented land and such a time we have had with the boll weevils this year. They ate most of our cotton crop so it didn't leave us very much money to pay our debts. I guess we won't have very much of a Christmas unless our good Cheerful Letter friends remember us. I have three boys, ages 14, 16, and 19, who attend school, and my greatest wish is that they may receive some pencils and paper for school use, and some candy and reading for Christmas. I also have my 18-months grandchild with me and a few toys or scrapbooks would be nice for her. Hope I am not asking for too much but life is so hard for us that a Christmas box for the family would bring a great deal of happiness into our lives at the holiday season. Mrs. E. D. Tyson, Route 3, Waynesboro, N. C.

12. I hope I am remembered at Christmas time—and not forgotten. I haven't written for a long time, but now I would like some reading and quilt pieces. Mrs. Nannie Staten, R. 2, B. 49, Wadesboro, N. C.

13. My little sister and I would appreciate some scrapbooks and used Christmas cards. When answering this appeal it is suggested that some candy and nuts be included in the box. Miss May Hawn, Chelsea, Okla.

14. Mrs. Goldie Walker, Dabney, Ark., hasn't been heard from for a long time, so we are giving her space in our Christmas issue. Her home is in the back woods, forty miles from the nearest town. She is 29 years old and has two girls, ages 15 months and 8 years, and a boy, age 5. A Christmas box to include the whole family is recommended.

15. I am a young married woman, age 21, just starting housekeeping. We live on rented land and far away from any

neighbors. May I please be on your Christmas list and I leave the selection to your workers? A small package would give us the right Christmas spirit. Mrs. Birchum Wilcox, Husk, N. C.

16. As the holiday season approaches, I wonder if the Cheerful Letter Exchange will think of us. I have had a bad case of rheumatism and am in pain most all of the time. I can sew a little and my small girl in the seventh grade of school would love some games and jigsaw puzzles, or any kind of school material. Mrs. Scott Hurley, Hector, Ark.

17. I am a girl 16 years of age and my mother has been dead for four years. I have two sisters and a brother, younger than I, and they all attend school. Will you please be Santa Claus to us this Christmas? And send some reading for father. Miss Mildred Coleman, R.F.D. 1, Spencer, Va.

PLEASE NOTICE

For additional Christmas Appeals please address Mrs. Laura M. Hurst, 78 Penfield St., Roslindale, Mass. There are many last minute Christmas requests that deserve our attention.

OUT OF THE DARKNESS OF THE PAST HAVE COME MANY OF THE SYMBOLS OF CHRISTMAS

FROM the dim ages of long ago have come many of the festive rites and customs of our Christmas season.

The symbolic use of a tree dates back at least 4,000 years, when Egyptians celebrated in honor of their Sun God, in the month corresponding to our December. They believed that the sun died every night and was born again in the morning, and that late December and January brought the turning point, when the sun remained with them a little bit longer each day. This was a season of rejoicing, and the palm tree became their symbol, as it put out a leaf every month and the twelve leaves symbolized the complete year.

A few thousand years later came the feast of Saturnalia, also held in December, but the tree the Romans used was a tall conifer, loaded with decorations. Roman legions carried this symbolism over the Alps into Gaul; and about 15 B.C. the tree was used in Yuletide celebrations of the Germans.

Hundreds of years passed, and a tree became the symbol of celebrations connected with the patron saint of Russia and of children—Saint Nicholas, who in his lifetime was Bishop of Myra, in Asia Minor.

An old legend tells us that the kindly St. Nicholas unintentionally originated the custom of hanging stockings by the fire at Christmas. St. Nicholas was rich, and loved to make mysterious journeys bearing secret gifts to the poor. For a long time his identity remained hidden but he was caught at last with his sack of gifts on his back.

St. Nicholas knew an old nobleman who was very poor and who did not want anyone to know of his poverty. Wishing to give him a gift of money St. Nicholas crept to a window of the house and saw the old gentleman asleep by the fire. The good Bishop climbed to the roof and dropped his gift down the chimney, thinking it would fall on the hearth at the nobleman's feet. However, it so happened that the old gentleman's daughter had hung some stockings to dry by the fire and the money fell into one of them; and from the kindly deed of the good Bishop has grown the widespread custom of hanging stockings at Christmas time.

The anniversary of St. Nicholas' death in 1087 became a festival in the Russian church, and in time the name became corrupted to Santa Claus. As the date of the festival of Santa Claus was so close to our Christmas Day the two feasts became confused, until today Santa Claus is closely bound up with the festivities of the Christmas season.

Somewhere around the year 350 A.D., December 25 was set definitely as the date of the birth of Jesus Christ; and the tree and its decorations, the holly and the mistletoe, became universally recognized as the joyous symbols of Christmas.

In the pagan past the Druids believed

that in the holly and mistletoe the fairies found shelter. They particularly revered the mistletoe because of its mysterious birth, and paid great sums of money for a piece of it to hang around their neck as a charm. They called the mistletoe "All-Heal," and believed it had power to protect against witchcraft, and to cure not only the wounds of battle but of sin and strife as well. Enemies who met beneath mistletoe in the forest laid down their arms and declared a truce.

When the early Christian church adopted the Druidic custom of decorating their churches with green boughs the mistletoe was omitted, because it had figured so prominently in pagan religious rites.

The holly wreath speaks of timelessness—the endless circle of eternity.

The Yule log, with its warmth and hospitality, had its origin in "Juul," when the Scandinavians used to light huge fires in honor of their god Thor.

Much superstition was connected with the Yule log many years ago in England. It was supposed to possess magic and occult powers; it symbolized sunshine, and secured the vitalizing influence of the sun during the coming year. The burning of the Yule log figured as the center of family life and the dwelling place of ancestors. It was chosen weeks before and carefully dried. Then, decked and garlanded, it was dragged by ropes or chains to the baronial hall and the great hearth, and the fire started with the charred end of last year's log.

Not only the trees themselves but their decorations are symbols: the glittering tinsel ornaments are a sign of light and life, and originated in the pagan rites of sun worship. The lights on the trees represent the flash of lightning overhead; apples, nuts and balls symbolize the sun, moon and stars; and the little animals stand for the sacrifices made to the sun.

Two thousand years ago these symbols took on a new significance. The lighted fir tree became the sign of new life in the midst of the wintry darkness of a pagan world—the light of the world, the tree of life. New symbols were introduced: the angels, the anchor, the cross and heart, the star of the east crowning the tree and typifying the brilliance which guided the wise men to the stable, and the golden threads that stand for the bright hair of a child.

Christmas candles are a relic of Saturnalia. In those days candles were exchanged as gifts, as well as used for illumination. Some authorities state that the burning of candles originated at the Jewish Feast of Dedication, which was held about the same time of year as the

festivities of Saturnalia and the Yule. The green, red and white candles stand for everlasting life, cheerfulness and purity.

Hanging gifts on the Christmas tree is a custom derived from the pagans of ancient Rome, who gave gifts to each other at their winter festivals.

Christmas carols probably originated in the song and dance of the Druidic ritual, and, until the year 588, when the English church fathers abolished the custom, singing and dancing carols in church was a part of the Christmas service.

The carols sung in church delighted the people, and one evening, as the candles flickered and the shadows danced over the high, dusty rafters of the dimly lighted church, the singers, carried away on a great wave of joyous enthusiasm, marched down the aisle and out of the door with the congregation crowding after them, all lustily singing. From that moment carols were sung in the streets of England, thanks in great measure to the "waits"—the men who waited on winter nights in the streets to give assurance to those snugly indoors that all was well, and to shout the hours as they passed by.

These "waits" eventually became the town musicians, singing and playing and keeping the old carols alive in the streets just as minstrels had formerly done in the castles and great halls.

Long before the turkey graced the boards of English speaking countries a boar's head had the place of honor at the Christmas feast. Tradition has it that one day a student at Oxford was walking in the forest studying Aristotle, when a boar rushed at him. The student's only weapon was the book and he crammed it down the beast's throat and choked it. He could not afford to waste his book and so the board's head was cut off and the book recovered; and as the boar's head could not be wasted either it was taken to the college and roasted and eaten. And so the boar's head became the ceremonial dish at the Christmas festival.

Christmas cards first appeared on the scene in London nearly 90 years ago. A visiting card was the first Christmas card used, and on it were written the words "A Merry Christmas."

And so the joyous season of Christmas comes once again, to cheer the hearts of young and old, to brighten the world and to make it, for one day at least, a place of "peace on earth, goodwill to men."

—Fireman's Fund Record.

THE LEGEND OF THE CHRISTMAS ROSE

ON the first Christmas night, when the shepherds were sent by the angels to kneel before the Child of Bethlehem, a little girl named Madelon, whose brother was a shepherd, followed them to the inn. But when she found that they had brought a pair of doves, some fruits, and honey as offerings to the Holy Child, she felt ashamed to enter empty handed and turned sadly back toward the lonely hills. Now, as she wandered weeping in the early dawn, a light shone about her and a radiant figure appeared, the glorious Gabriel himself, to ask the reason for her tears. "Because I am so poor I have no offering for the Babe of Bethlehem," she answered.

Then, with his shining wings, the angel brushed the ground around them and everywhere sprang up the loveliest white flowers. Eagerly the child gathered great bunches of the blooms and hurried back toward the inn. A glittering procession went before her—the Magi and their retinue bearing sumptuous gifts. But the Holy Child turned with a smile toward the little girl and stretched out tiny hands to take the flowers.

—Selected.

CANDLELIGHT

I like to put a candle
In the window Christmas night
That all who pass along the road
May have its steady light
To guide them for a little way,
To send them ruddy cheer,
That they who walk a path alone
Will know a Friend is near.

—J. Earle Nycoff.

WITH OUR BOYS AND GIRLS

THE ROAD TO CHRISTMAS

DAISY D. STEPHENSON

FOR months Jack and Joan Jordan had simply lived for the family Christmas reunion to be held in their Kansas home. Judge and Mrs. Jordan had written letter after letter to kinfolk, east, south, and west. And by late November it was fairly settled that there would be enough visiting relatives to make it the most remarkable family reunion in all the "Sunflower State."

At first Uncle Johnny wrote from Brooks Field that he planned on coming for Christmas.

Gram had been so excited she had marked off the days on her little Calendar of Cheer. Then—that brief, disappointing note from Uncle Johnny telling them he was afraid it was all off, and they were not to count on him.

But here they were on Christmas Eve, gathered around the log fire in Judge Jordan's pleasant big living room—twenty of them, counting the four little sleepyheads upstairs in bed.

On the piano stood a book of old carols that Mother Jordan would play when the guests were a bit talked out and the embers glowed redly.

"I want to sing 'Away in a Manger,' and Jack likes 'O Little Town of Bethlehem,'" Joan told her cousins. Then Daddy loves 'The First Noel,' and of course we always sing 'Silent Night,' Gram knows the story of the first Christmas by heart, and maybe we can get Grandpa Jordan to tell us a true story of the Wild West. Oh, isn't it fun?"

The firelight shone warmly on the happy faces, old and young and middling. Joan had peeped out to see the Christmas stars shining bright and serene, and she thought of that long-ago night when a special radiant Star shone over little Bethlehem, guiding the Wise Men and the wondering shepherds to a manger. The next minute she was snuggling up to Grandpa and confiding: "You never saw such mince pies! And there's pudding, too, and, of course, turkey with giblet gravy—Uncle Johnny loves it—"

Grandpa nodded gravely, though his lips twitched under his snowy mustache. "Mary"—his gray eyes twinkled at Mrs. Jordan—"is there a burglar alarm in your pantry? Though after that prime dinner of yours I reckon I can worry along till morning. Joan's trying to make my mouth water for the Christmas dinner, and I'm about convinced I'd better skip breakfast."

"No skipping for me," laughed Uncle Tom, who had come home after a long absence in South America, where he had been building bridges. "I've counted on this Christmas for three hungry years, and I don't mean to miss a thing." And one big brown hand reached over and gently rumpled his mother's soft, silvery hair.

"You did travel a long way to get here, Tom." Gram smiled fondly at her biggest son. "But it's been worth it to me already. Now if only Johnny—" She sighed and fell silent.

"We rode three days on the train," boasted Billy who, with his mother and small brothers, had journeyed from the East to join this family party. "Some day," he predicted in an outburst of enthusiasm, "I'll come faster. I'll fly. I'll start after breakfast and land here for supper."

Judge Jordan's glance rested on his father, hale and erect at eighty; on little, lovable Gram Stockton, serene and seventy. Then his eye passed from the uncles and aunts in their prime to the rosy-cheeked, eager-eyed children.

Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow. How the world had progressed since his father had traveled on horseback about the Western gold camps! How the world would change before Jack and Joan grew up and kept Christmas in their own homes!

"Well," remarked Grandpa, lighting his pipe with a coal from the hearth, "I reckon we've all traveled some strange roads to Christmas in our time. Eh, Sarah?" He smiled at Gram Stockton

reflectively.

"I was just thinking, John," she smiled back, "of the time sixty-odd years ago when my folks drove from the little sod house on the Iowa prairie to spend Christmas Eve and next day with friends in town. Ten whole miles it was over a nearly unbroken prairie. I remember we shut the chickens up snugly and left feed and water for them. But the dog and Clover, the cow, had to go along.

"Yes," she nodded as the children burst out laughing. "Clover followed along behind the wagon and Patsy, the dog, was with us three youngsters on the straw-covered wagon-bed. It was bitter cold, but we had hot soapstones for our feet and we didn't mind. It was a big event in our lives to go visiting, and though the oxen plodded along and the wagon jolted and lurched over the frozen ruts, we didn't know any better way of travel. We had a little cedar tree our friends in town had gone far to get, and I still remember how good the molasses taffy and mother's caraway cookies tasted."

"Oh, Gram, is that all you got? Didn't you hang up your stocking?" cried wee Anne in consternation.

"Indeed we hung up our stockings! Good, stout woolen ones they were that Mother had knitted us. I found a beautiful corn-husk doll in mine and a little doll-house my father had tinkered up. Then there was a new blue dress and bonnet for me made over from one of Mother's. We had a wonderful time, and a blizzard came up and we had to stay three days," Gram wound up, flushed with reminiscence.

Grandpa looked deep into the leaping flames and traveled far back into Yesterday. The days were clamoring for something true and thrilling.

"Well," he began, sliding down in the big chair till his backbone was quite comfortable, "I reckon the most exciting Christmas I recall was when I was riding as scout for the stagecoach that carried mail and gold dust down to Platte City from the gold diggings of Leadville and Tarryall. I had the fastest, smartest roan pony. 'Blue Blazes' I called him. I was just turned eighteen, but I felt plumb grown up.

"The older men who guarded the stage when it carried something extra important called me the 'Kid.' Blue Blazes could outrun the other scouts' horses, and I was a pretty good shot in those days.

"This time I'm telling about I'd ridden down to Platte City and seen the mail safely through.

"My game little pony, sure-footed as a burro, was on the hardest stretch in the cañon—narrow and slippery and crooked as a snake that trail was! I was humped over trying to keep the wind from going right through my bones when suddenly Blue Blazes jumped and snorted and pretty near spilled me off. Bang, bang! There was shooting and screaming ahead of us where the road widened.

"Well, we hustled right ahead to the scene of action and there was a big, rough-looking fellow with black whiskers holding up a stage and a driver I'd never seen before. Nobody noticed us at first, for the driver was wounded and slumped over in the seat. Inside the coach a gentleman was holding up his hands and looking fairly worried as he stared into the business end of a gun. A pale, pretty girl was taking off a gold chain and handing it over to Blackbeard when I got busy myself.

"I surprised that gent all right. Things were right lively for a minute or two, during which I got Blackbeard's gun and returned the money and jewelry to the tenderfeet from the East. I did what I could for the driver, but it was plain he couldn't drive any more that day. So I herded Blackbeard into the front seat, gave the gentleman the gun he'd been looking at so hard and said, 'See to it that he takes you on to town. Then turn him over to the sheriff.'

"But he didn't seem to want the job. He was an editor from Washington City, it seemed, and more familiar with the pen than a weapon. Besides, his daughter begged me to go along and protect them. So, as I didn't have any Christmas

dinner waiting me at home, I rode beside them on Blue Blazes, and that spunky little pony was as brisk as if he wasn't cold and hungry and tired.

"Honey, that was the best Christmas I'd ever had," Grandpa assured her, his eyes blinking through a sudden fog that obscured the fire. "I ate dinner with the strangers and Mary Alice, and I got acquainted and—well, I don't need to go on. You know how she came out West to stay two years afterward, and we had our own log cabin with the little organ that traveled across the plains for your grandmother, Mary Alice. I don't think I ever saw stars as bright as they were our first Christmas together. And Mary Alice sang 'Silent Night'—mind playing it for me, Mary?"

Mrs. Jordan wiped away a mist from her own eyes and went to the piano. But before she struck the chord the front door opened boisterously and into that peaceful, contented company burst a tall, smiling young man in flying togs. Everybody exclaimed in chorus, "Johnny!" And everybody made a bee line for the newcomer, but Gram reached him first. There was a joyous hubbub for awhile, you may believe. And when it had quieted down a bit, Grandpa expressed the feeling of the whole happy family.

"Now everything's tiptop and all hunkydory with Johnny here. He traveled a road to Christmas that's too high and rapid for me, but he made it and that's what counts. Now Mary, let's have the song!"

"All roads to Christmas follow the Star and lead to Love," said Mother Jordan reverently, and played the opening strains of "Silent Night." —*Christian Register.*

THE CHEERFUL LETTER EXCHANGE

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